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DALLAS MORNING NEWS

# Holding on to memories of 11-22-63



**JOHN  
ANDERS**

I still have the  
permission slip  
allowing me to  
leave school that  
day:

DISD Form S-  
45; Principal's  
Permit to Leave  
School.

This was the  
standard form  
that got you out of class to have a cavity  
filled, or allowed your family a half-day  
head start on a vacation trip to Lake  
Murray, Okla.

Only this form was dated 11 a.m.,  
11-22-63. And in the space provided below  
where the printed form said, "Your  
child . . . is being excused from school  
for the following reason:", the handwritten  
explanation simply said, "President."

I've kept that eerie souvenir because  
— despite the nightmare that followed  
— there's still an odd, hopeful tone to be  
detected in that yellowed piece of paper.  
The day began with such promise.

## **End of Innocence**

At the very least, not many people  
have a memento documenting their last  
moments of innocence.

Things changed for all of us that af-  
ternoon. A whole country lost its inno-  
cence.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Dallas In-  
dependent School District had decided  
to allow its students an opportunity to  
leave school and see John F. Kennedy in  
Dallas.

In those naive times even presiden-  
tial parade routes were published in the  
local newspapers.

The principal of my high school  
grudgingly abided by the school board  
ruling, but he still voiced his disapprov-  
al over the intercom a few days prior to  
the presidential visit.

"It's a matter of your personal val-  
ues," he told us. "Personally, I think you  
belong here in school."

Our late principal was like that: an

arch conservative who often invited right-wing speakers to address us in assembly. Dallas in those days was a place where we beat our crape myrtle bushes repeatedly in search of Communists.

There were never enough to go around.

Only a small handful of our school's 3,200 students saw President Kennedy, although many kids left Bryan Adams High for a few hours to hang out at the Prince of Hamburgers on Garland Road. Everybody figured he had to make the best of whatever opportunity presented itself.

### **PICKING our spot**

Three of us left for the parade route in Bob Spiro's '49 Chevy. We settled on the corner of Lemmon and Oak Lawn to watch the motorcade pass from Love Field en route to downtown.

After 15-20 minutes of waiting, we rushed forward into the street toward the approaching limousine. I remember thinking, *"Why, I could reach right out and touch him."*

My eyes first focused on John Connally's impressive blade of a nose. Then I saw JFK: tanned, handsome and full-faced. He was smiling. Jackie was a blur of pink: I never saw her features.

And that was it. In a moment the limo had moved onward toward its terrible destiny less than 10 minutes away. I walked away thinking this was probably the most exciting moment of my 17-year-old life.

We ate sandwiches near Turtle Creek before heading back to school. At the very moment of our quiet celebration on the creek, the madness was occurring a few miles away in Dealey Plaza.

That evening, while trying to sort out the terrible events of the day, my girlfriend and I drove around the neighborhood near our school. We couldn't accept that anything so shatteringly awful could have happened in the midst of our senior year and right in our own back yard.

Finally, I pulled the car over to the side of the road, and we fell into each other's arms and wept — a pair of scared, uncomprehending kids. It was a scene probably repeated throughout the country that day. The assassination changed everything.

I suppose I keep that permission slip because it's a touchstone to the morning we went out to see the president of the United States and came back to a world that would never again be the same.